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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: JULY 24, 2008

Summary: The decision by the ruling coalition to pursue dialogue rather than military operations in FATA dominated headlines in all newspapers on Thursday. Newspapers reported that a meeting in this regard, chaired by the Prime Minister Gilani, decided to let the parliament evolve a greater consensus against extremism. In a front-page report, the English daily "The News" quoted an unnamed American official as saying that Pakistan portrays a worst-case scenario in the present circumstances. Another story in the same paper revealed that U.S. officials will deliver several key policy messages next week to the Prime Minister Gilani during his upcoming visit. Riyadh's denial that the bomber of the Danish embassy in Islamabad was a Saudi national also figured prominently.

Several newspapers ran editorials on the situation in Afghanistan and Taliban. The English daily "Dawn" observed that the sources of Taliban funding must be destroyed and if ISAF is not going to do this, it is Pakistan's job to move into Afghanistan and destroy poppy fields and laboratories. The leading Urdu daily, "Jang," observed that the intention of the U.S. charges about the presence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistani tribal areas is now crystal-clear; it wants to hit these areas. Another Urdu daily, "Ausaf," opined that it is now obvious that the United States will not refrain from violating Pakistan's border and airspace on mere weak protest or complaints; Pakistan will have to abandon expediencies and bid adieu to U.S. financial help, and talk to the U.S. administration straightforwardly. End Summary.

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News Stories  
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11. "Coalition Leaders Go For Talks In FATA; Parliament To Evolve Greater Consensus Against Extremism" "The News" (07/24)

"Leaders of the ruling coalition in their meeting here on Wednesday resolved to pursue dialogue rather than military operation in the militancy-hit FATA, saying force would be used only as the last resort. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani. The coalition partners agreed that parliament would discuss the formulation of a national policy to mobilize the public support for greater consensus on Pakistan's battle against extremism and militancy."

12. "Pakistan In A Worst-Case Mode, Says U.S. Official" "The News" (07/24)

"Presently, Pakistan portrays a worst-case scenario because the government in Islamabad instead of aggressively pursuing the militants in the tribal areas was offering them sanctuaries in return for a ceasefire, a top U.S. official has said in a deep background briefing. The terror-related fatalities in Pakistan, the official admitted, had increased three times since 2006, but the government was unable to understand that the militants wanted to

destabilize the country."

13. "U.S. Overcomes Musharraf-Phobia To Back New Set-Up" "The News" (07/24)

"Several key policy messages will be delivered next week to Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and his coalition partners, including a firm assurance that Washington had got over its Musharraf phobia and was willing wholeheartedly to politically and economically support the new government, a senior diplomat in Washington said on Wednesday."

14. "Saudi Arabia Refutes Al Qaeda Claim About Bomber's Identity" "Dawn" (07/24)

"Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Pakistan denied an Al Qaeda claim that a suicide attacker who bombed the Danish Embassy in Islamabad last month was a Saudi, in comments published on Wednesday."

15. "'Surrender' Of Taliban Commander Raises West Hopes" "Dawn" (07/24)

"Western officials in the past have suspected the Pakistani security services of turning a blind eye to the presence of Taliban leaders in Quetta. Recent unpublicized arrests in Quetta, however, raised hopes of a sea-change in Pakistan, a senior western official said.... A statement issued by British forces in Afghanistan late on Tuesday said Mullah Rahim, operational commander of the Taliban forces in Helmand, had surrendered to 'authorities in Pakistan.'"

16. "300 People On Baitullah Mehsud's Hit List" "Daily Times" (07/24)

"The intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been put on high alert based on the news that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan chief Baitullah Mehsud has prepared a hit list of around 300 high-profile figures, including political leaders."

17. "Hangu Operation Halted: ISPR" "Dawn" (07/24)

"Army wound up its week-long operation in the troubled Hangu district on Wednesday evening after flushing out militants and taking control of the area, said the military spokesman Director-General of the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Maj-Gen Athar Abbas on Wednesday."

18. "U.S. Expert Defends Pakistan Military Aid" "The News," "The Post" (07/24)

"The United States and Pakistan currently have a relatively high point of military relationship despite ups and downs, a noted American defence expert said, while also strongly defending the U.S. security assistance for Islamabad's conventional balance with India. "Today, the relationship is a relatively high point," defence analyst David Smith said."

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Editorials/Op-eds  
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19. "Across The Durand Line," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (07/24)

"The biggest blot on the U.S.-led forces is their inability to cut off the Taliban's sources of funding and arms supply.... The sources of the Taliban's funding must be destroyed, and if ISAF is not going to do this, do they think it is Pakistan's job to move into Afghanistan and destroy those poppy fields and the laboratories?"

10. "More U.S. Troops To Afghanistan," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (07/24)

"According to some media reports, the United States is planning to dispatch 11,000 additional troops to Afghanistan next year. The intention of the U.S. charges about presence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistani tribal areas is now crystal-clear; it wants

to hit these areas. NATO's violations of Pakistani border and airspace also make public their objectives. The visit of Democratic presidential aspirant Barack Obama to Afghanistan and Iraq is also making this perception stronger. Therefore, it is crucial that the government open its eyes, discontinue military operations in FATA at once, and opt to decide issues through nonviolent dialogue process."

¶11. "Need To Adopt Bold Stand To Stop Foreign Intervention," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (07/24)

"It is now obvious that the United States will not refrain from violating Pakistani borders and airspace on mere weak protest or complaints. Pakistan will have to abandon expedencies and bid adieu to U.S. financial help, and talk to the U.S. administration straightforwardly. The nation will certainly support the rulers on that move, if they choose to talk to Americans decisively."

¶12. "American Desire To Take Action In Tribal Areas," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (07/24)

"The recent statements of Asif Zardari, PM Gilani, and the NWFP government show that now the government is not in a mood to talk to the Taliban any further. And perhaps, it may launch a military operation to wipe out 'terrorists' from FATA before PM Gilani leaves for Washington. What will be the outcome of that military adventure? It is not very difficult to figure out for the Pakistani people, as they have been bearing the brunt of such exploits for the last six or seven years."

¶13. "Taliban's Deadline," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (07/24)

"The Government hasn't taken note of the Taliban deadline and the operation in Hangu and Swat continues. Even on the expiration of the deadline, the Taliban have stressed the need for dialogue; the Frontier government also wants dialogue. But which is the force in Islamabad that is not letting the two sides hold talks? On the other hand, who are the people raising arms despite the Taliban's declaration of peace? The Taliban should expel such anti-peace people from their ranks and support the government in bringing them to justice."

¶14. "Rare Insight," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (07/24)

"The interview with Mustafa Abu Al Yazid, a senior Al Qaeda commander who is believed to be third in its hierarchy, gives an insight into the thinking of extremism. The charge that Pakistan, more than any other country, had inflicted the most damage on Al Qaeda is one that goes to prove Islamabad's consistent assertion before Washington that it is locked in an all-out battle against terrorists and is not, as has been alleged, colluding with them."

¶15. "Strained Talks," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (07/24)

"At present, Kabul and New Delhi seem to be batting on the same team. The U.S. too appears to tilt towards them, and this leaves Pakistan rather isolated. This is clearly undesirable. Improved regional ties, particularly with India, are central to betterment in Pakistan's economic situation. Analysts have also pointed out such warmer relations could also help challenge militancy in the country, by encouraging people to look eastwards, towards the multicultural reality of the subcontinent and our roots within it, rather than towards the west and the more militant, violent legacy of militancy that has come from Afghanistan."

¶16. "The Threat Remains," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (07/24)

"The government has reiterated its stance that it is committed to a negotiated settlement of the conflict and has pointed out that the situation in Hangu had compelled it to have recourse to force. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan should show willingness to accept the

offer and withdraw its ultimatum, realizing the fact that attempts at violating the writ of the state would not be tolerated. The two sides must work hard to make the talks successful so that peace, once returned to the area, becomes durable."

¶17. "Political Equality For FATA," an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (07/24)

"To insist that the ongoing insurgency in the tribal areas is the exclusive outcome of Afghan Jihad would not be fair; the fact is these areas and their people have been treated differently, if not discriminately, not only by the colonial power but Pakistan governments as well. Under the Constitution, they have a different status that tends to hinder their fuller political, social and economic growth."

¶18. "The Afghan Odyssey," an op-ed by Ikram Sehgal in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (07/24)

"Before venturing into FATA militarily we should have not only war-gamed the consequences but trained our troops in the type of counter-insurgency being faced by Coalition troops across the border. Frontier warfare or guerrilla warfare as taught in Command and Staff College is outdated. Air mobility and electronic capability that the Coalition possesses is a critical necessity for us, this we have only partially. In this type of terrain it is virtually impossible to counter an insurgency without exploiting the heliborne potential."

Patterson